FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Programmes Inter-nationaux

Montreal YMCA International Programs July 2000

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

PROFILE: THE ACJ/YMCA OF ECUADOR

The YMCA/ACJ was established in Ecuador in 1959 and has an active presence in the communities of Quito, Machala, Portoviego, Chone and Santo Dominigo de los Colorados.

As Germánico Pinto, former chairman of the board of the Ecuador ACJ, so eloquently pointed out during a recent talk at the Downtown YMCA in Montreal, the YMCA in Ecuador is not a recreation centre, it is a vehicle of empowerment for the poor; for youth, women and the disenfranchised.

Due to the rapid urbanization process in Ecuador, there is a large population of poor people in the urban areas, living without water or sewage systems. The ACJ works in these neighbourhoods to help the people understand their rights and responsibilities, to evaluate the needs of their communities and to organize in order to voice their concerns to the appropriate government powers.

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The ACJ works in neighbourhood development with other social organizations in a number of different areas. The ACJ has published neighbourhood leadership manuals that help with that community development process. They also work in improving housing, basic services and the environment. In the area of health, they train health promoters in health education and preventive medicine. The ACJ is very active in youth development and also trains community mothers to work in the government day care centres which are managed by the ACJ.

The ACJ of Ecuador has become known worldwide for its innovative and effective youth programs. They believe that youth have the right to live with dignity without discrimination due to age or sex, that they have social, civil and political rights and that their opinions count. They recognize youth's knowledge and feelings and help them develop the skills necessary to take an active role within their community and country. The ACJ participates in The Acuerdo Nacional Juvenil del Ecuador (ANJ), a youth network that works for the rights of the child. The ANJ organized a youth event, **"Peace is Youth",** involving youth organizations from Peru and Ecuador to work towards creating a "culture of peace" that would end the border disputes between their two countries.

The ACJ has formed the Cultural Caravan "Frog Family" to promote human rights. Youth volunteers present cultural and artistic activities that deal with youth and children's issues and rights. This Cultural Caravan has toured Colombia and is featured at the Youth Pavilion of Hope at Expo 2000 in Germany this year.

The ACJ of Ecuador has also created a Casa da la Juventud, an alternative youth space managed by young people themselves and where youth volunteerism, leadership training, employment initiatives and citizen participation are promoted.

Every summer, the ACJ of Ecuador trains young people to work as volunteer monitors with children in day camps in poor neighbourhoods of Quito, Chone, Portoviejo, Santo Domingo and Machala. The success of their preschool programs led the ACJ to establish a primary school, offering 80 students a more complete education than is currently available.

The YMCA also focuses on environmental education; its youth ecology clubs do hands on work in an Ecology Park.

Youth volunteers organize regular video-forums and do radio broadcasts weekly to reach out to the youth in cities such as Santo Domingo de los Colorados.

The YMCA/ACJ recognizes the importance of global cooperation in its work and has developed mutually rewarding relationships with the YMCAs of Montreal, the USA, Germany, Peru, Ireland, Spain and Switzerland. The three year "Children At Risk" project was a partnership between the Montreal YMCA and the ACJ of Ecuador; it developed "Hands Up!, a children's rights educational manual. The ACJ of Ecuador produces and distributes the Spanish version, "Manos Arriba" while the Montreal YMCA offers the English and French editions.

The YMCA/ACJ of Ecuador is a strong community organization. It relies mainly on volunteers to carry out its work, with youth taking a major role. The ACJ believes in the potential of youth and knows that by educating, developing, investing in and empowering the young people of Ecuador, a more just society can be created in their country in the future.

BRIGADISTA DIARY

On June 26, Julie Madore (International Programs) and Sean Curran (Pointe-St-Charles YMCA) arrived in Honduras for an eight week stay. The remaining five members of the Brigadista Team will be joining them on July 22 for three weeks.

Julie and Sean have been sending emails highlighting their experience as it unfolds. The following are excerpts from their communications...

June 27

We got here fine, our accomodations are perfect and we already have a great schedule for the week. We visited the reconstruction project and it is great. They are trying hard to really build a new village in a participatory way. It is really like building a new life.

Everbody here is so welcoming and friendly.

June 29

We are visiting project after project and starting to help out a little bit. Last night we went with a group of youth to install garbage cans in a neighbourhood in 'reconsruction'. I guess there is always a certain amount of reconstruction going on. People seem to be fixing and building a lot in the poor colonias. The group was absolutely amazing and hard working. They have been volunteering for a year now. On the 23rd and 24 th, just after (the rest of) the Brigadista arrive, there is a leadership camp organized for youth from the ACJ. I plan for the Brigadista to participate. Next week we are off to Marcala and Taulabe (two rural areas of Honduras).

July 8

These past two weeks have been very interesting. We have been very busy visiting the various YMCA projects going on in and around Tegucigalpa and it looks like this summer is going to be a lot of fun. In fact, people here are so excited about your arrival (the rest of the Brigadista Team) Julie and I were even interviewed on the radio!

The way things appear right now, it looks like our time here will be divided into two parts. For the first week we will be working at a youth center in the colonia of San Francisco in Tegucigalpa. We have already been to visit it and it looks like it will be a great experience. For the last two weeks we will be working on renovating the new youth center in a small town called Marcala. We spent the last couple of days there and the people were really great. During our stay we will be staying with families.

Look for the continuation of the Brigadista Diary in the next issue of "For Your Information".

HERSTORY

World March of Women 2000

Montreal YMCA International Programs will be holding workshops in YMCA centres from July to October concerning the demands of the World March of Women 2000. These half-day sessions will include reflection and discussion on the effects of poverty and violence against women and possible solutions. Banners for the World March of Women will be made by the participants. These workshops are open to all women, youth and men who wish to participate in the upcoming World March of Women 2000. All those interested in attending a session should phone Julie Madore or Sheila Laursen at International Programs, 849-5331, ext. 264 for more information on the dates and centres which will be involved.

Here are the special activities planned by the Marche mondiale des femmes, Coalition de l'ile de Montreal for the week of Oct. 9 to October 13, 2000.

Monday Oct. 9

March decision: The Montreal YMCA will not be participating in these activities in respect for Yom Kippur which falls on the same day.

Tuesday Oct. 10

March in the West end of Montreal

Theme: Redistribution of wealth to help eliminate women's poverty.

Wednesday Oct. 11

March in the North end of Montreal

Theme: The elimination of discrimination against all women.

Thursday Oct 12

March in the East end of Montreal

Theme: Estabish laws that protect the rights of women

Friday Oct 13 -

Full Moon Night March "Take back the night march" to Parc Lafontaine

Celebration to close the events of the week, with performances by singers, dancers, etc.